

H4
(Cont.)

mutually spaced apart longitudinally extending portions about the circumferential surface of the blank[, the even number being at least six, the resulting tampon having an approximately circular compressed fibre core from which longitudinal ribs extend radially outwardly, each of the ribs having a distal end and a coarser capillary structure than the fibre core, each of the ribs being separated from one another by longitudinal grooves], and the longitudinal ribs [having been exposed to a radially acting second pressure, the second pressure being] are compressed radially inward at a second pressure, lower than the first pressure [so as], to provide a soft structure at the distal ends of the longitudinal ribs.

2. (Thrice Amended) Tampon according to Claim 1, wherein the blank comprises a [needled nonwoven tape] tape-shaped nonwoven material consisting of 100% rayon fibre, wherein the tape-shaped nonwoven material is a needled nonwoven tape, the absorbent portion of the tampon has a weight of [no more than] 2.4 g, and has a specific absorption capacity of [at least] 4.8 ml/g at an absorption rate of [at least] 1.9 ml/s.

3. (Thrice Amended) Tampon according to Claim 2, wherein the absorption capacity of the tampon is [at least] 11.3 ml at a static counterpressure of 20 mbars.

4. (Thrice Amended) Tampon according to Claim 2, wherein at a pulsating counterpressure of 20 to 110 mbars, the absorption capacity of the tampon is [at least] 8.0 ml and the specific absorption capacity is [at least] 3.4 ml/g.

H5

6. (Thrice Amended) A process for producing a tampon comprising the steps of: (i) winding up a length of tape-shaped nonwoven material [so as to form] to form a blank; (ii) radially pressing a circumferential surface of the blank at a first pressure over an even number of mutually [adjacent] spaced apart longitudinally extending portions [in] about the circumferential surface of the blank so as to produce a preform, the even number

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being at least six, only the longitudinally extending portions of the circumferential surface of the blank being pressed, whereby the preform has a central approximately circular compressed fibre core and a plurality of longitudinal ribs formed between the longitudinally extending pressed portions, each of the longitudinal ribs extending radially outwards from the fibre core and being separated from one another by longitudinal grooves, each of the longitudinal ribs having a distal end; and (iii) exposing only the longitudinal ribs to a radially applied second pressure, the second pressure being less than the first pressure so as to soften the distal ends of the longitudinal ribs.

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8. (Twice Amended) Process according to claim 6, [wherein] further comprising the step of moving the preform [is moved] between the step of radially pressing a circumferential surface of the blank and the step of exposing the longitudinal ribs to a radially applied second pressure.

H7
9. (Thrice Amended) An apparatus for producing a tampon from [a] an approximately cylindrical tampon blank, comprising: (i) first and second groups of press dies, at least [six] three press dies in each group, the press dies arranged in a plane perpendicular to a longitudinal press axis and adapted to move radially inward toward the longitudinal press axis into a closed position so as to press [a] the tampon blank into a tampon preform, the first group of press dies having side flanks so that when the first group of press dies are in the closed position their side flanks form guide surfaces for each of the second group of press dies, each of the press dies having an end face, the end faces collectively forming [an essentially cylindrical pressing face] a generally cylindrical surface having a diameter when the press dies are in the closed position, each of the press dies having a press cutter having a distal end projecting from its end face toward the longitudinal press axis, the distal ends of the press cutters are extended to an essentially equal radial distance from the longitudinal press axis in forming the tampon preform, each of the press cutters adapted to form a [rib] groove in [a] the tampon

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preform, leaving ribs extending outward from the longitudinal press axis between adjacent grooves, the [rib] ribs each having a distal end; and (ii) a stationary conical forming die arranged coaxially relative to the longitudinal press axis for softening the distal ends of the ribs,) the forming die having an entry orifice [and an exit orifice, the entry orifice] having a diameter that [matches] approximately corresponds to the diameter of the generally cylindrical [pressing face] surface formed by the end faces of the press dies [when they are] in the closed position, [the] and a smaller exit orifice [having a diameter that matches the final cross section of the finished tampon].

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15. (Thrice Amended) Apparatus according to Claim 14, [wherein each of the press cutters has a distal end, and] wherein when the press dies are in the closed position, the distal ends of the press cutters are disposed 2 to 4 mm from the longitudinal axis. diameter of 20 mm and an exit orifice with a diameter of 13 mm.

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¹²17. (Thrice Amended) Apparatus according to Claim ¹¹16, wherein the approximately cylindrical tampon blank has a diameter and all the press dies are adapted to move radially inward to approximately the diameter of the tampon blank, the press dies of the first group being adapted to move further radially inward into the closed position before the press dies of the second group move further radially inward.

H10
¹⁴19. (Thrice Amended) Apparatus according to Claim ¹³18, further comprising (i) an input end adapted to receive [a] the blank, and (ii) a ram arranged on the input end, the ram being axially movable for pushing [a] the preform through the conical forming die.

H11
20. (Twice Amended) A tampon comprising:
an approximately cylindrical fibre core formed by [compressing] pressing an approximately cylindrical fibre blank, obtained by winding up a length of tape-shaped nonwoven material, radially inward at a first pressure over at least six longitudinally

extending regions spaced apart around the circumference of the fibre blank to form compressed regions defining the fibre core; and

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at least six longitudinal ribs extending from the core, the ribs [being formed] resulting from portions of the blank disposed between the compressed regions so that the ribs are less compressed [relative to the core] and have a coarser fibre structure relative to the core, each of the ribs having a distal end, wherein the ribs [having been subjected to a] are compressed radially inward [compression less than that applied to form the core so that] at a second pressure, less than the first pressure, to provide a softer structure at the distal ends of the ribs [are softer than] relative to the core.

Please add the following claim:

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23. A tampon for feminine hygiene, comprising a generally cylindrical absorbent portion having a generally cylindrical compressed fibre core from which longitudinal ribs extend radially outwardly, each of the ribs having a proximal end attached to the fibre core and a coarser capillary structure than the fibre core, and each of the ribs being separated from adjacent ribs at the proximal end by longitudinal grooves.--

In the Abstract:

After the Claims, please add new page 15 which is attached with the heading "ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE".

REMARKS

The specification has been amended to clarify the relationship between the drawing and specification, to clarify the field of invention, and to correct obvious typographical and administrative errors. In particular, the first paragraph has been amended to remove references to the "pre-characterizing clauses" of the patents and insert descriptive language essentially therefrom. Page 4 has been amended to specifically refer to particular figures of the drawing in relationship to two embodiments of the invention: the first wherein the longitudinal ribs meet and fully obscure the